The Visual AIDS Web Gallery ’Proud to be Positive’

June 1, 2015 By Mark S. King

June is Pride Month in the LGBT community, and I was honored to be asked by Visual AIDS to **curate a digital exhibit** on the topic. Immediately, I considered a question that **I had once posed to readers** of my blog.

If living with HIV is nothing to be ashamed of, is it something to be proud of?

It was a really interesting exercise to explore this question, and I hope you will **head over to Visual AIDS** to check out the exhibit online. Visual AIDS has thousands of images of artwork that represent the artistic expression of hundreds of artists living with HIV.

Of course, including these artists in my exhibit meant that I was assigning meaning to their work in a way they may never have intended. That’s okay. Art is gloriously subjective. In the image Self-Enforced Disclosure (Greg Mitchell, 2007) above, I could help but believe that a man who would tattoo his HIV status on his body did not do it to shame himself. But is it an act of pride?

From my curator statement:

> No one should be marked or shamed for living with HIV. But, should someone claim to be proud of being positive, there is a lingering, implicit threat to the statement, as if their pride is untrustworthy, or worse, that having the audacity to feel proud of living with the virus must mean they want to infect everyone else.
>
> We must reject the stigma that labels people with

HIV as predatory, irresponsible, and lacking in self-respect. Being proud of all that we are is hardly the same as wishing it on others.

I hope you will check this out and share your thoughts.

Mark

p.s. My writing is my artistic expression, and I really appreciate the response I have received to my essay in the new June issue of POZ Magazine, **“Surviving Life Itself.”** The piece reflects on my relevance, and lack thereof, as a 30-year survivor of HIV, and what kind of impact others like myself can have in the here and now. I hope you will grab a copy at your local clinic or pharmacy, or **read it online here**.

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